

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER.

(Condensed from Publishers' Select Notes.)

Lesson X. June 5. Dan. 3: 13-25.

THE FIERY FURNACE.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.—Isa. 43: 2."

EXPLANATORY.

1. THE THREE NON-COMFORTS.—13. *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.* The three young men who joined with Daniel in refusing to defile themselves with the king's meat (Dan. 1: 6, 7, etc.). They must have been at this time 30 to 35 years old, in the prime of young manhood and usefulness. They were rulers in the province of Babylon, and therefore prominent men. When all the rest at the sound of the music had bowed down in worship before the golden image, these three men stood up, and were conspicuous all over the plain, like a city set upon a hill, by their unbowed forms and their splendid robes of office. This conduct was quickly reported to the king by certain Chaldeans, ranked among the wise men and magicians (2: 2).

14. *In his rage and fury.* That the command of so mighty and successful a monarch should be disregarded by his subjects, for whom he had done so much. The greatest monarchs and generals bowed before him—how dared his captives resist his will, and publicly to insult his authority? It was treason! It might, too, bring upon him the anger of his god, to be shown in future defeats. It marred his plans for the occasion, and brought in discredit. It was a public example of resistance to his will, which he thought might have a bad effect upon others.

15. *Is it true.* Or as in Rev. Ver. is it of purpose that ye serve not my god. Do you really mean to do so? Are you so foolish?

16. *The cornet was a horn, whether straight or curved. Flute.* The reed-flute, or shepherd's pipe, which consists of several reeds of different thickness and length bound together, and played at the end. *Harp.* A harp, or lyre like our own. *It was carried under the arms, and played with both hands, one on either side of the strings.* *Sackbut.* A sharp-stringed instrument, having a sharp, clear tone. A large harp, similar to our own. *Psaltery.* An instrument like our lyre. *Dulcimer.* A sort of bagpipe, an instrument consisting of two pipes, which are passed through a leather bag, from which their ends protrude equally above and below, the lower of the pipes being played with the fingers like a flute. The modern dulcimer is an instrument of a triangular form, strung with about fifty wires, and struck with two light and slender hammers. *All kinds of music.* The Babylonians were very fond of music.

17. *Who is that God that shall deliver you?* Nebuchadnezzar thought that having conquered all countries with his local gods by aid of his god Bel-Merodach, whose golden image rose before him, the gods who failed to save their people from defeat in battle, would of course be unable to save them now.

18. *Answered and said to the king.* They appear to have answered promptly and without hesitation, showing that they had carefully considered the subject, and that with them it was a matter of settled and intelligent principle. *We are not careful.* Old English for anxious, solicitous. *Rev. Ver. We have no need.* (1) Because it would be useless to reply to the king in his present temper. They could not challenge him. (2) Their actions had answered him already. (3) Their minds were made up, and nothing could change them.

19. *God's Two Ways of DELIVERANCE.* First, BY SAVING FROM TROUBLE.

17. *If it be so.* If the decree remains unrevoked, and you seek to cast us into the fiery furnace. Or, "If it be so, and best." *Our God whom we serve.* Only those who serve God can claim His protection and His promises. *Is able to deliver us.* He is stronger than the idol god of Babylon, or than the great king, for He is Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe. So we can pray the Lord's prayer in faith, because of the truth, "for thou art in the kingdom and the power." If God did not deliver them from the furnace, it was not because He did not love them and care for them, but because it was best for them, and for the cause they loved more than life. *And He will deliver us out of thine hand.* In the way that seems best to Him. See Margin of Rev. Ver.

20. *SECOND, BY SAVING THROUGH TROUBLE.* COMPELLING IT TO WORK OUT MORE GOOD THAN THE DELIVERANCE WOULD HAVE DONE.

18. *But if not.* If God should not see fit to save them from the furnace. They add this "if not" to show that they did not presume to the God to this deliverance absolutely; for God knows how to deliver, and sometimes to suffer His saints to glorify Him by suffering. They were resolved to venture suffering rather than sinning, and leave the cause to God. *We will not serve thy gods.* They could not do wrong, come what might. They could die, but they would not sin.

19. *They stood alone.* Luther, when he stood before the Diet of Worms, knew that even in that council he had friends. But in that vast assembly that day, these three men stood there, while enemies abounded, friends they had none.

20. *They stood against a World-Power.* As well might a man try to sweep back the Atlantic tide with a broom as they try successfully to resist the mandates of Nebuchadnezzar.

21. *They thus withstood a Friend.* For in many ways the king had been to them a friend. He had treated them well. But methinks I hear some scholars say: "Well, but they know that Jehovah would deliver them out of the burning fiery furnace. I would just as soon go into a furnace as hot as Nebuchadnezzar's, if I knew beforehand that it would not harm me. So I cannot see why those three men should be so praised for their courage." To this we answer: "That was exactly the point about which they were not sure. They knew perfectly well that God could deliver them, but they were in the dark as

to whether God would do so." In this very uncertainty as to the result lay the acme of their moral fortitude. When they stood up before the king, and declined to do as he bade them, they were not at all sure but in the next ten minutes their bodies would be burned to a crisp.

22. *THE FIERY FURNACE.* In the form of his vision was changed. By the anger and passion it expressed. His feelings got beyond control. *Heat the furnace one seven times more.* (1) The increased heat and the proportionate fury of the flame typified increased homage to the "god of fire," a supreme God of the Babylonians, whose majesty and divinity were impugned by the rebellious contempt of the "three children." (2) It expressed the passionate feelings of the king. "This fact is mentioned to show the greatness of the miracle, which followed." Fuel abounded in the locality, and as vast amounts of naphtha were found in the wells around Babylon, there could have been no difficulty in obtaining a very intense heat at the expense of a very small amount of labor.

23. *Commanded the most mighty men.* From whom there could be no escape. *Cast them into the burning fiery furnace.* Either, as the editor of Calmet thinks, a fire kindled in the open court, like a place set apart for burning martyrs; or a scorching furnace in the form of a pit with an opening at the top and a door in the side. Possibly one in which the gold was prepared for the image.

24. *Bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats (see Rev. Ver.).* Modern inquiry has, however, shown that the dress here described was that of the Babylonian courtier of the day. In the time of Herodotus (1: 195, see Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*, III: 1 seq.), the well-to-do inhabitants of the capital wore a long linen gown reaching down to the feet, a woollen gown or tunic over this, a short cloak or cape of a white color, and shoes like those of the Boeotians.

25. *Because the king's commandment was urgent.* And the executioners could not take time to make themselves safe, or the fire was so hot on account of the king's urgency. *The flame . . . slew those men (see ver. 20) that took up, etc.* to the top of the furnace. When the opening at the top of the furnace was opened, the flame rushed out with such violence as to kill the executioners. This made the preserving miracle more manifest, as the bodies of the mighty men lay scorched by the side of the furnace within which the martyrs were living and safe.

26. *These three men . . . fell down into the fiery furnace through the opening in the top.* *Bound.* That is, when put into the furnace. Their chains would not melt in the flame.

27. *THE MARTYRS' DELIVERANCE.* 24. Then (soon after they were cast into the furnace) the king was astonished. An old and obsolete form of the word "astonished." The king sat watching the issue of the matter looked through the door into the furnace, and saw a sight at which he was astonished and terrified. He was astonished (1) that the three men were not consumed; (2) that they were loose; (3) that a fourth man was with them. The king then turned upon him that he has come into conflict with a new and unknown power. *Use up in haste.* Expressing the strength of his astonishment and terror. *Said unto his counselors.* The word means the highest officers of government who were in immediate attendance upon the king; his ministers of state. He calls their attention to the strange appearance.

28. *Four men were seen.* Had their bonds been of inflammable material, they would naturally have been loose. But the Babylonians were accustomed to find their captives and prisoners with chains (Jer. 40: 4; 52: 11), and only a miracle could burn the chains while the men were unharmed. *And they have no hurt.* How completely God preserved them may be seen from the examination, by the king's officers, of the men after they had come from the furnace (ver. 27), when they found that their clothes were not even scorched, nor their hair singed, and that not even the smell of fire was on them. *The form of the fourth is like the Son of God.* As the article is wanting in the sacred text, it is more correct to read "a son of the gods" (as in Rev. Ver.). Only a divine being, the king knew, could live thus in the fire himself, or preserve others there. No doubt in reality it was the Son of God, who, as "the angel of the Lord" at various times appeared to the Old Testament saints.

29. *It is implied that the fourth form was no vision seen by Nebuchadnezzar alone, but a visible angel seen by him, and by his officers as well.*

30. *THE RESULTS.* 1. *The effect on Nebuchadnezzar was his recognition of the God of the Jews as superior to all idols.* "It did not follow that he would accept the God of the Jews as his own, or give up his own national gods, or suggest to his people the adoption of the worship of 'the most high God.' The deliverance was public and unmistakable, and it would make such an impression on the princes and people, that the king could more easily treat the Jews more kindly." 2. *The effect on the Three Men* was that they were reinstated to their places with more influence and permanence than ever. But it may be that after so many years of prosperity their piety needed rekindling, and a new experience.

31. *The Effect on the Ediles* was also good. It would enrich their faith; it held before them noble examples; it would enable them to realize the power and goodness of God; it was one of the forces that during the exile entirely cured them of idolatry and prepared them for the return and the rebuilding of their city and temple. Doubtless also it raised them to a higher place among the people, and enabled them to serve their God with less opposition and persecution.

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A Memory of Rome.

Many years since, on a beautiful December evening, my friend and I turned our steps on to the terrace of the Pincian Hill in Rome, where we had been walking and watching the exquisite sunset and the soft evening lights as they fell upon the low towers and domes of that ancient city, and beautified its crumbling ruins and noble arches, and entered the Via Sistina and approached the little church of Trinita de Monte, just as the bells were ringing for the vesper service.

Small and unpretentious is this church, but it contains some famous marbles and a few noted pictures, one of them, "The Descent from the Cross" by Daniele da Volterra, is considered by many the third picture in the world. The church, however, is best known by its peculiar service, conducted entirely by a company of young men, who stand in a gallery at the farther end of the church, behind a fretted brass screen, their forms draped in filmy illusion, and indistinctly seen in the dimly-lighted church, but their voices distinctly heard as they sweet, harmonious notes float up and down over the still and reverent worshippers, like the voices of an angel choir.

The reverence of the audience, the kneeling posture of many on the cold marble floor, as we entered, was very suggestive, and brought to mind the words of an old evening song of Piedmont:

"Ave Maria" is the hour of prayer, O God! I commune with ourselves and heaven, When our weak hearts their inmost thoughts declare. High, pure, far-reaching, like the light of even: When hope becomes fruition, and we feel The holy earnest of eternal peace, That bids our pride before the Omnipotent cease, That bids our wild and warning passions cease. Ave Maria! Soft the vesper hymn Floats through the choir of you holy pilgrims, And, 'mid the stillness of the night-watch dim, Attendant spirits seem to hear and smile."

But it was not only the novelty of this service, and the exquisite voices which impressed us. With these Mendelssohn was impressed, and wrote music and chants for that choir, to which the composer afterward listened, as the nuns, whom he never permitted to see, chanted his compositions. It was the reverence of the audience which made a deep and lasting impression upon us.

Among the worshippers who quietly entered the church, and knelt unconsciously of those about them, was a tall, large, military-looking gentleman, wearing a military cap and cape overcoat, and by his bearing giving one the impression that he must be a general or some high army officer. To see such a man kneeling reverently and humbly on a cold marble floor in the presence of one or two hundred people, and apparently unconscious that he was observed, or that there were others than himself in the church, was a strange sight indeed. Then, too, the reverent attitude of every one who entered, the absence not only of all chatter, but of even quiet conversation in the vestibule of the church, was noteworthy, and especially when contrasted with the conduct of many members in our churches here at home, whose pastors are often obliged to request that there should be quiet in the vestibules and corridors, and that no persons should be seated during the opening prayer.

Washington Irving when visiting in England was greatly moved by the reverent attitude of the worshippers in a little church in the country which he attended one Sabbath morning. In one of his delightful essays, in which he describes the day, he wrote, regarding the people at church, "Not that they appeared to have any special fervor or devotion, but rather a respect for sacred things and sacred places inseparable from good-breeding."

While there is to every Protestant much to be deprecated in the service of Catholic churches,—much of formalism, and superstition and heartlessness,—there is, we must allow, a reverence for the church, and a demeanor in the church which we would do well to emulate.

We noticed, too, when the service was concluded, and the people began to separate, that the music in the organ was still sacred, beautiful, worshipful, not such as Pope described, and which still raps the spirits of many in these days:

"Light quivers of music, broken and uneven, Make the soul dance upon a jig to heaven."

Neither was there gossiping in the aisles, nor in the vestibules, but for that little time the spirits of the worshippers were allowed to be undisturbed in that

"hushed communion with ourselves and heaven," which is so grateful, so necessary to the souls of the multitudes, who, amid the weary work and care and strife of the week just gone, have found few moments for spiritual enjoyment and heavenly aspirations and ennobling thoughts and hopes.—Standard.

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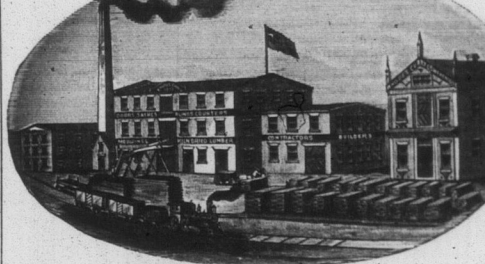
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